

Remarks of Barry C. Black, Ph.D, Chaplain, U.S. Senate
Monday, December 12, 2005
Opening Plenary – 2005 White House Conference on Aging

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BARRY C. BLACK, Ph.D.: —Psalm verse 14 states, "They shall still bear fruit in old age." We should be productive throughout the seasons of life. And one of the purposes of a conference on aging should be to ensure that people have a chance even in life's evening to live productively.

The first command given by the Creator to humanity was "be fruitful"; Genesis, Chapter 1, Verse 28. As we grow older we should bear the fruit of knowledge. The longer we live the more we should learn. As we grow older we should bear the fruit of integrity. There is something about the moral authority that comes from a long life well lived.

I think of Billy Graham after 9/11 in the Washington Cathedral. He personified what Aristotle called ethos. The longer we live the more we should bear the fruit of patience. A long life should remind us that life is not a sprint but a marathon.

And the longer we live the more we should bear the fruit of generosity, for the closer we get to the evening the more we should realize that our lives consist not in the abundance of the things we possess and that the Lebanese-American poet Khalil Gibran was correct when he said, "You give but little when you give of your possessions; it is only when you give of yourself that you truly give."

And if we bear these fruits, knowledge, integrity; if we bear the fruit of generosity and humility; if we bear the wonderful fruits, ethical fruits, in old age, the fruit of patience, what we will discover is as we and Cullen Bryant put it, we will approach our gray as one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams.

Let us pray. Eternal Lord God, Creator of the seasons of our lives, we thank you for this first White House Conference on Aging in the twenty-first century. We praise you for the opportunity to reflect together and discuss issues that will result in substantive recommendations to bless those in life's evening. Guide and inspire conference delegates and participants. Open our eyes to see the light of your wisdom. Use us to assist the aging in productive and abundant living through the shadow of the night.

As we deepen our awareness of the needs of the aging, give us the courage to act. May these efforts lead to an improvement in the quality of living for all people. Bless us today as we honor the memory of champions who have died. We thank you for the legacies of Martha Eves, William Layman, Arthur Fleming, Edward Roybal, Daniel Patrick Monahan, Myrna Lewis, Rosalyn Way, Maggie Kuhn, and Jane Kennedy. May their noble footprints on the sands of our history challenge us when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams come true because we have dreamed too little. May their courage rebuke us when we arrive safely simply because we have sailed too close to the shore. May their vision inspire us to dare more boldly, to

venture on wider seas where we will do the impossible by your power. We pray in your Holy Name, Amen.